



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

May 24, 2023

Director Martha Williams
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Director Williams,

We are writing to you today to express our concern regarding the United States Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) proposal to establish the French Creek National Wildlife Refuge. While the stated goal of the USFWS's proposal – to protect French Creek – is a sensible one, we believe this proposal exceeds the necessary safeguards for the watershed. Additionally, we have concerns regarding your agency's lack of engagement with local governments and communities, who will bear any direct or indirect impacts of this proposal. We ask that you reconsider this proposal and focus your efforts on assisting the robust conservation efforts already established by local residents.

Our region understands the importance of an incredibly unique resource like French Creek. For decades, local governments and organizations in our area have invested resources and time into preserving French Creek so that future generations of Pennsylvanians and New Yorkers may enjoy the watershed.¹ These efforts resulted in French Creek being named Pennsylvania's 2022 "River of the Year".² A healthy, vibrant, and biodiverse French Creek has long been a critical focus of our constituents, and we continue to support these voluntary, locally led efforts to help conserve this vital ecosystem.

We are greatly concerned that federal oversight would only bring unnecessary regulations and unintended consequences to an area that is currently thriving under local supervision. Federal ownership of these lands would take the properties off local tax rolls, thus depleting the communities' ability to maintain existing protections. Instead of working against ongoing conservation, the USFWS should support our local land trust and conservation groups who have decades of experience in protecting this asset.

Since the announcement of the proposed French Creek National Wildlife Refuge, we have heard from numerous constituents and groups who have grave concerns with your agency's plan. Input

¹ <https://www.goerie.com/story/lifestyle/2022/06/09/french-creek-conservancy-users-protect-pa-2022-river-of-the-year/65347577007/>

² <https://pecpa.org/news/french-creek-is-2022s-river-of-the-year/>

from those who are truly impacted by this proposal should be of the utmost priority in your consideration.

As federal representatives of Erie, Chautauqua, Venango, Crawford, and Mercer Counties, we respectfully ask USFWS to reconsider any federal designations without local input. We request a timely response by June 2nd, following the end of the public comment period on May 26th.

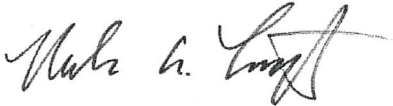
Sincerely,



Mike Kelly
Member of Congress



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress



Nick Langworthy
Member of Congress